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New San Diego Courthouse

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The new courthouse proposed for central San Diego would replace three court buildings in downtown San Diego: the County Courthouse, the Family Courthouse, and the Madge Bradley Courthouse. These buildings have been found to be unsafe, overcrowded, and inadequate for modern court operations. It would also bring downtown a small claims calendar from the Kearny Mesa courthouse, improving service to residents of the central San Diego area.

Scope

The proposed project would provide the court's central court district with a full-service, consolidated facility for criminal, probate, family court, and small claims services.

Courtrooms: 71

Approximate total area: 704,000 square feet

Estimated total project cost: \$633.9 million

Current status: Environmental study and preliminary design

Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Builder: to be selected

Expected completion: January 2016

This project is on the Judicial Council's list of "Immediate and Critical Need" projects. It is the largest of 41 projects to be funded under the recently approved Senate Bill 1407 court construction program. Initial phases of the project were authorized for funding in November 2009. These initial phases include site selection, which includes environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act, and preliminary plans, which is the first phase of architectural design.

Deficiencies of Current Buildings Drive Need for New Courthouse

The County Courthouse and the Family Courthouse are both rated as unacceptable seismic risks. A fault line with surface rupture potential lies immediately beneath the north tower of the County Courthouse, increasing the risk of major disruption and damage from an earthquake.

In the Madge Bradley Courthouse, an office building converted to courts, the only public access into the building is via a single street-level elevator; there are no public stairs. When the elevator is out of service, the public must use the unprotected fire-service stairs, accessible only from the city sidewalk.

The County Courthouse also has numerous public safety and security problems. The building lacks a dedicated in-custody transfer system, forcing deputies to escort defendants in chains through public corridors, stairways, and elevators, as well as through private judicial corridors (see photo below). Courtrooms, judges' chambers, deliberation rooms, and public waiting areas are located directly above two busy public streets—B and C Streets—thereby creating vulnerability. This practice is extremely unsafe to the public and requires extra court security personnel.



County Courthouse: Prisoner transfer path (marked by yellow lines) through public corridor. Defendants are escorted through public stairways, elevators and hallways as well as through judicial corridors.

Local Government Collaborates on Project

The County of San Diego and the City of San Diego are in strong support of a new courthouse in downtown San Diego and enthusiastically endorse the project. The County and the AOC have negotiated a county-wide agreement that, among other things, would provide the state with a property suitable for the new courthouse near to the Central Jail, subject to approval and environmental review.

Senate Bill 1407 Funds Critically Needed Courthouse Construction

This project is funded by SB 1407, landmark legislation signed on September 26, 2008, that launched an unprecedented courthouse rebuilding program in California. The law paved the way for up to \$5 billion in new courthouse construction and renovation projects, funded directly by judicial branch revenues or financed through lease-revenue bonds. The law created a revenue stream from court fees, penalties, and assessments to finance these projects, ensuring that they would be paid for from within the judicial branch rather than drawing on the state's general fund. The

Judicial Council approved a list of 41 construction and renovation projects, the most urgently needed in the state, to be financed by SB 1407.

The Judicial Branch Facilities Program

The Trial Court Facilities Act of 2002 gave the judicial branch the responsibility to plan, acquire, design, build, operate, and maintain all court facilities transferred to the state. The Judicial Council has assigned these responsibilities to the AOC, through its Office of Court Construction and Management (OCCM).

OCCM is responsible for managing day-to-day operations and maintenance and facility modifications for more than 18 million square feet in approximately 450 buildings. The current capital program includes more than 50 courthouse projects, both new construction and major renovations, with an estimated total cost of over \$6.5 billion.

More Information

San Diego project Web page:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/projects_sandiego.htm

San Diego project Budget Package:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/documents/sandiego_budgetpackage.pdf

About Senate Bill 1407:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/sb1407.htm

Building California Courthouses:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/building.htm

For further information, please email the AOC Office of Court Construction and Management at OCCM@jud.ca.gov.